

SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE



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BULLETIN  
Sweet Briar College

SWEET BRIAR, VIRGINIA



Sweet Briar College--An Interpretation

BY

EMILIE WATTS McVEA, Litt.D., LL.D.

President of Sweet Briar College

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Published by Sweet Briar Institute

NOVEMBER—JANUARY—APRIL—JUNE

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## Foreword

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Since the writing of this bulletin the second presidency of Sweet Briar College has come to an end with the resignation of Dr. Emilie Watts McVea,—a resignation dictated solely by the necessity for the conservation of impaired physical strength.

Sweet Briar College is happy in the election on May 2nd of Dr. Meta Glass as its third president. Dr. Glass is a scholarly woman, an able executive, a progressive educator, and a delightful personality. She was the unanimous choice of the Directors and of President McVea and her acceptance of the headship of the college insures its future.

The Directors, President McVea, the Faculty, the Alumnae, the Student Body, unite in pledging to the new President of Sweet Briar College their unfaltering loyalty and their earnest support.



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## Sweet Briar College,— An Interpretation

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Less than twenty-five years ago a lonely woman lived in a delightful old homestead on a southern plantation among the sheltering hills of Virginia. The joy of life had gone from her when her only and much-loved daughter died. In her grief and loneliness she planned a memorial to her child, a memorial which would help to mould the lives of countless young girls in the years to come. Today Sweet Briar College, with its beautiful buildings and its exquisite setting, stands as an enduring monument to Daisy Williams. So, a short life has become a long life; so, grief has been transformed into strength and joy.

For nineteen years now Sweet Briar has guided the educational life of many young women who have come from the north, from the south, from the east and from the west.

What place has the college made for itself during that time? Among the numerous colleges of the country what special distinction may it claim? Has it developed its own inherent possibilities or has it copied other institutions so meticulously that it has foregone educational and spiritual aims of its own?

We believe that Sweet Briar, like all colleges of the higher type, has its distinctive aims, its stamp that marks its students for its own. It is standardized but not stereotyped; it believes that the institution is valuable only as it develops the mind, the creative talent, the soul of the individual.

From its inception, for instance, Sweet Briar has enjoyed religious and educational freedom—a freedom reflected in all its policies. There is no word in the will of Mrs. Williams directing that the foundation should be under the auspices of any special church or limiting in any way its educational development. The institution was to be managed by a board of seven directors who should have the power to fill vacancies in their numbers. The deed of gift specified that “the said corporation shall with suitable dispatch establish and shall maintain and carry on upon the said plantation, a school or seminary to be known as the Sweet Briar

Institute \* \* \* It shall be the general scope and object of the school to impart to its students such education and sound learning and such physical, moral, and religious training, as shall in the judgment of the directors best fit them to be useful members of society."

This liberal educational policy was in accordance with the practice of the Fletcher family. Dr. Elijah Fletcher, the father of Mrs. Williams, was himself a graduate of the University of Vermont and for many years a teacher in Amherst County. He gave to his sons and daughters exceptional advantages in higher education and in travel. Mrs. Williams was a fine pianist and linguist. Evidently she desired her foundation to be of high scholastic order. When her plan was formulated in the nineties there were practically no colleges for women in the South and "Institute" was the name then given to the higher educational development.

In March 1901 at its meeting of the Directors, consisting of the Rev. J. M. Carson of Lynchburg, Mr. Stephen R. Harding of Amherst County, the Rev. Arthur P. Gray of Amherst, the Rev. Carl E. Grammer then of Norfolk, Judge Legh R. Watts of Portsmouth, and Dr. J. M. McBryde, with the Bishop of the Diocese of Southern Virginia, the Right Reverend A. M. Randolph, as their president, the Board determined that the Foundation should be free from denominational control but distinctly religious in character, and that uniting classical and modern ideas of education it should maintain the highest college standards. From the first its educational ideals were high, but for a time, because preparatory schools were few and inadequate in the South, Sweet Briar Institute maintained both a preparatory school and a college. In 1919, however, the preparatory school was permanently discontinued. So by the generous bequest of the Founder and the wisdom of the Directors Sweet Briar College was established.

One of the most persistent current mistakes concerning Sweet Briar has been the idea that it is a rich college; nothing could be further from the truth. After the buildings were erected and the necessarily expensive operations for maintaining a college in the country were completed, there remained only the smallest endowment. During the last few years, however, the value of the large land holdings has increased and the endowment has grown. Neither land value nor endowment, however, has kept pace with



the rapid development of the college. The faculty has been doubled and the number of students has risen so rapidly that for years the dormitories have been sadly over-crowded and the classrooms utterly insufficient for the demand made upon them.

From the beginning the college has had certain definite ideals of its own. From its opening in 1906 it has demanded fifteen units for entrance, a requirement then in effect in few southern colleges. Its curriculum, though necessarily limited, was sound, and notwithstanding pecuniary limitations the first president of the college, Dr. Mary K. Benedict, with the coöperation of her Directors, maintained a high standard of scholarship.

The present president, Dr. Emilie Watts McVea, and the faculty, have made clear certain underlying principles of the college. The curriculum is limited to liberal arts and it is the purpose of the college that these courses should be truly liberal in content and in spirit. The well defined work of the freshman and sophomore years gives place in the junior and senior years to a major system carefully planned, so that a student may find herself at the end of her college course with a real basis for professional work and with the proper equipment to become a right-thinking, high-minded member of society. The natural sciences are especially emphasized. Unlike many of the colleges for women in the north and in the south Sweet Briar grants both an A.B. and a B.S. degree. The latter degree was provided for in 1918 on the principle that a young woman should have the privilege of entering the college of her choice and pursuing a course involving science and modern languages. The B.S. degree, however, is not merely the equivalent of the A.B. degree with Latin omitted; this course requires more work in the natural sciences and limits the majors to natural and social sciences.

From the first Sweet Briar determined that it would avoid a multiplicity of separate schools such as a school of home economics, a school of music, a school of art; but that the cultural aspects of such subjects should be included in the regular degree courses of the college. Home Economics, not based primarily on cooking, and not including textiles of any kind, but dealing with budgeting, interior decoration, and advanced forms of cooking, is an integral part of the regular college curriculum, just as it is a normal part of the life of practically every woman.

Serious courses in the history and appreciation of music and in the history of art are offered not as utilitarian subjects but as a vital part of the great body of cultural knowledge and real stimuli in fostering the creative arts. Sweet Briar was the first college in the South to recognize the cultural value of practical music by standardizing these courses and by giving to them college credit. Courses for the understanding and the creation, in a simple way, of the drama still further enhance the elasticity of the program. The dramatic associations, too, although extra-curricular, have done much to foster creative talent. Under the able direction of the late Robert Dempster and of the present professor of dramatic literature the dramatic association has studied questions of lighting, stage decoration, scenery, and out-of-door plays of all kinds, thus greatly enhancing and enlivening the more serious work of the college courses in drama.

That the educational policy of Sweet Briar is academically sound is evidenced by the standing of Sweet Briar graduates in the graduate and professional schools of such universities as Yale, Chicago, Johns-Hopkins, Columbia, Minnesota, Syracuse, Cornell. Especially noteworthy has been the work in physical science. At present Sweet Briar graduates are doing advanced work at Yale; Columbia; Oxford, England; and Toulouse, France. Today Sweet Briar stands a college of the first grade, recognized by every standardizing agency in the country; with an enlarged curriculum; with new buildings in the process of construction; with an enlarged faculty, and with a vigorous, distinctive student body.

From its foundation Sweet Briar has held that the healthy happy life is the effective life and that the four years of college work should increase both physical strength and joy. Athletics and sports have, therefore, always been an important factor. At a time when desultory exercises in formal gymnastics formed the usual course for girls and young women, Sweet Briar developed basket-ball, tennis, track, swimming, boating, riding, hiking, and hockey. Careful physical examination and constant medical supervision have done away with the danger of strain and brought about, in sports and gymnasium work, the best physical results. The students delighting as they do in sports rarely fail to improve in health. The out-door life made possible by a campus of nearly three thousand acres; the mild but invigorating climate of the Blue Ridge moun-

tains; the exquisite beauty of hill and vale and lake have all contributed to vigor and to happiness. Inter-class games, a few inter-collegiate games of basket-ball, tennis and hockey, give the zest of competition without the evils attending the professionalizing of sports, which has been so unpleasing an episode in the history of many of our men's colleges.

The social life at Sweet Briar has always been free, happy and democratic. The students are drawn from homes of great comfort and from homes of small means. They come from every section of the country. The wide distribution of Sweet Briar students is a distinctive and valuable feature. The college has more students from sections other than the South than have all other southern colleges combined. Varied traditions, varied political and social interests induce tolerance, human understanding, a broader point of view and react beneficially on the social and intellectual life of the student body.

Sweet Briar believes that proper social activities have a large place in the life of the normal human being. Social dancing is not prohibited and students are allowed to attend a certain number of college dances in the college towns nearby. Twice a year the Sweet Briar girls themselves give dances and on Saturday evenings young women who have guests may invite them to participate in the informal dancing of the evening. This freedom, rather unusual in the southern colleges, is based on the belief that college life should in a measure parallel the life of the outside world; that young people delight in dancing; and that openly recognized dancing, directed and guarded, is far better for them during their college life and for their future than such pleasures reluctantly relinquished or indulged in when it is possible to evade the authorities.

Dramatics, outdoor sports, French clubs, history clubs, classical clubs,—all the varied associations of the normal college student, give fine outlet for the enthusiasms of youth and form a basis for friendships that will last through the years.

Sweet Briar countenances no artificial associations. The students are proud of the fact that it is one of the few women's colleges in the South that has no fraternities. The life is wholesomely democratic; no luxuries, such as automobiles, or elaborate expenditure are permitted or desired. For four years even the most

indulged girl, the girl who has been most accustomed to spending money, finds her joy in natural beauty, in friendly association, in simple living.

The social activities of the year reach their climax at May Day. The lovely Boxwood Circle about Sweet Briar House offers an exquisite setting for the crowning of the May Queen. The dainty colors of the lovely spring dresses, the blossoming dogwood, the youth and joy of the May Queen and her Court, form a picture which once seen is never forgotten. Year after year girls come back to Sweet Briar for May Day, to renew happy associations and to refresh themselves in the midst of possibly a more arduous living with the radiance of that lovely day.

Nor is the religious and spiritual life of the college less cared for than is the academic life. Unfettered by denominational ties, Sweet Briar has developed a fine spiritual life based on the abiding verities of the Christian religion. Students and faculty form a community congregation; the church council, composed of members of the student body and of the faculty, plan for the services and direct religious activities. Older people, who sometimes feel that youth cares little for religion, would be enheartened at the deep religious spirit and the search for real truth evidenced by many of our best college students today.

Health, happiness, abiding friendships, and widening horizons that come from increased knowledge, are the rightful heritage of Sweet Briar students.

## The Spirit of Sweet Briar

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Quietly, gently, a little girl of long ago, was wont to slip down the old stairway of the manor house and out into the garden that she loved. There flowers bloomed for her; there the misty hills of the Blue Ridge encircled her round about. When she went away to the great city with its hurry and excitement the very name of Sweet Briar made a song in her heart. It sang to her of loveliness and kindness and home. This was the little girl in whose memory our college was founded.

To us, too, Sweet Briar means beauty. The spirit of our college must always include the love of beauty,—beauty in nature, in art, in life; the beauty of orderly thought and orderly living; the beauty born of murmuring sound, of blossoming orchards and still moonlit nights,—of friendship with nature.

Encircling us, as they encircled that little girl of long ago, are the everlasting hills glorifying our campus and adding strength to its beauty. They are to us the symbol of that confidence and quiet power of which the girl of today has need, the power finding its source in a well-developed body, a vigorous and questing mind, a soul informed by earnest purpose and high vision.

We are surrounded on every hand by the loveliness and by the simplicities of nature, and through these we may learn to think sincerely, to live truly, to serve nobly. May the *spirit* of Sweet Briar so inform our minds and hearts that we may go forth from our beautiful college with power and joy, and with courage to meet life's great adventure.

## My Ideal for Sweet Briar Students

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I would have the graduate of Sweet Briar a woman strong in body, sincere in thought, clear in vision; a modern woman, using the larger freedom of today while preserving the courtesy and the charm of the woman of yesterday. She should love beauty and carry it into the home, the workshop, and the world.

She should reverence true scholarship and she should know the joys of the mind. Revering wisdom more than knowledge she should press on eagerly to ever higher and nobler aspects of truth. She should never be afraid to think, but she should learn to test her thinking by the larger, wiser experience of the race.

She should rejoice always in life and life's great adventure; she should believe in work, and she should face her work and her responsibility with high courage. She should know that her vigorous body and thinking mind, her wisdom, her courage, and her joy are gifts to be used for the service of her day and time. Above all, she should have faith in God and good, and a belief in the high destiny of mankind.

EMILIE W. McVEA.

*President of Sweet Briar College.*

# Prayer at the Opening of College

by

EMILIE W. McVEA.

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O Almighty God, source of knowledge, lover of wisdom, we ask Thy blessing this morning upon the work of our college year. Grant to us earnest purpose, the strength to persevere, and a steadfast faith in the value of human life.

May students and faculty realize that we are all scholars and learners together, each intent upon his own work, each rejoicing in the success of others. Help us to search diligently for the truth as revealed by science, by literature, by the history of mankind.

May we rejoice in the opportunity of play, of comradeship, of work, realizing that without joy our lives are niggardly and bare.

From the beauty of our campus may we learn to love and understand beauty everywhere. Help us to interpret in our lives the beauty of simplicity, of sympathy, of fearlessness.

Deliver us from excesses and eccentricities in appearance, in manner, and in thought. Keep us from littleness and pettiness, from evil thinking and malicious gossip. Teach us the virtues of moderation; give us a passion for sincerity.

Endue us with abounding enthusiasm for real greatness, respect for the valuable accomplishments of the past, and a never failing belief in the possibilities of human attainment.

But above all, grant us through all our work and all our experiences to draw nearer to Thee, to understand ever more clearly Thy beauty and Thy harmony. May we find Thee, O Spirit of Truth, in all Thy works.

Help us to know that whatever else may come to us.—success, power, riches,—he who has failed to find God, has failed to find life.

AMEN.













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